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AUTHOR Konaxis, Antoinette
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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to increase the experiences in the genre of world drama, to further develop student understanding of its evolution and impact on subsequently created drama, and to proffer a diverse collection of drama for senior level students pursuing the Advanced Placement (AP) English literature program. A comprehensive curriculum, which explored the genre of drama and included a theater of the absurd component, was designed and was presented to the 15 students enrolled in an Advanced Placement English class. A curriculum unit was created for 12 works of drama which encompassed the categories of ancient Greek drama, Shakespearean drama, modern drama, and theater of the absurd. The unit included a historical perspective of the evolution of the genre of drama, incorporated instruction on drama conventions and structure of each of the above categories, and involved the reading and critical analysis of an eclectic drama collection. Even though all outcomes were not achieved, analysis of the qualitative data revealed that educational intervention via a drama curriculum unit can greatly affect student academic evolution and growth and can more fully prepare Advanced Placement English literature students. (Contains 24 references.) (RS)

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ED 434 375

Incorporating a Comprehensive Drama Unit Including a Theatre of the Absurd Component Within the Advanced Placement English Program for Senior Level Students

by
Antoinette Konaxis
Cluster 90

A Practicum I Report Presented to
the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
1999

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Dennis Corkery

Program Leader, English Department, Gloucester High School
Title

Gloucester, Massachusetts
Address

June 14, 1999
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Antoinette Konaxis under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

June 23, 1999
Date of Final Approval of Report

William W. Anderson, Ed.D., Adviser

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Abstract

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This practicum was designed to increase the experiences in the genre of world drama, to further develop student understanding of its evolution and impact on subsequently created drama, and to proffer a diverse collection of drama for senior level students pursuing the Advanced Placement (AP) English literature program. A comprehensive curriculum which explored the genre of drama and included a theatre of absurd component was designed and was presented to the fifteen students enrolled in the writer's sole Advanced Placement English class, 1998-1999.

The writer created a curriculum unit for twelve works of drama which encompassed the categories of *ancient Greek drama*, *Shakespearean drama*, *modern drama*, and *theatre of the absurd*. The unit included an historical perspective of the evolution of the genre of drama, incorporated instruction on drama conventions and structure of each of the above categories, and involved the reading of and the critical analysis of an eclectic drama collection.

Even though all outcomes were not achieved, analysis of the qualitative data revealed that educational intervention via a drama curriculum unit can greatly affect student academic evolution and growth and can more fully prepare Advanced Placement English literature students.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

Located in the New England region approximately thirty miles northeast of Boston, this 41.50 total square mile (land—25.97 square mile, water—15.53 square mile) fifty foot elevation small coastal community is rich with historical heritage. First arriving in 1603, Samuel de Champlain christened the area as Le Beauport and soon was followed by the Dorchester Adventurers in 1623 who established the settlement as the nucleus of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The oldest defenses of that colony are housed at Stage Fort Park, where the original cannons and protective walls still exist.

Numerous other national firsts are accorded the city: Judith Sargent Murray published "On the Equality of the Sexes," the first women's equality argument found in American literature; the Lady of Good Voyage Church was built, housing the first carillon (a series of chromatic bells) built in America; the first Universalist Church in America was founded; and, Clarence Birdseye invented and patented frozen fish processing, later selling to General Foods, the prior owner of the world famous Gorton's seafood company, still a major local employer. America's second greatest inventor, Dr. John Jays Hammond, holder of 800 patents, invented the remote control and built his castle overlooking the rocks made famous by Longfellow in "The Wreck of the Hesperus."

Additionally, the city has been a home for artists of international, national, and local stature: Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper, Fitz Hugh Lane, Emile Gruppe, Childe Hussam, Maurice Prendergast, Cecilia Beaux, Jane Peterson, Walker Hancock, and

Alfred Duca. Leonard Craske's famous landmark sculpture, *The Man at the Wheel*, overlooks the harbor and welcomes sailors, boaters, fishermen, travelers, and tourists alike. Designated as the oldest working artists' colony in America by the Smithsonian Institution, the Rocky Neck Art Colony is also home to a theatre company established and directed by world renown playwright Israel Horovitz.

The nation's oldest seaport, established in 1623, has enjoyed a thriving fishing industry allowing the city to consistently rank in the top ten fishing ports nationally. America's number one frozen seafood packager/producer, Gorton's, as well as lesser known companies, makes the city its home. However, legislative protection of certain fish species has greatly impacted the community economically, thus further encouraging a perennially successful tourism industry, including booming whale watch businesses. Other forms of industry include agriculture, construction, engineering, electronics, and manufacturing.

Incorporated in 1642 as a town and in 1873 as a city, the city is governed by a mayor, a city council, and a school committee. With a projected population for the year 2000 of 29,075, population density is 692 per square mile. Increasing to at least 40,000 residents in the summer months, the 11,579 local households are comprised of 28,508 Whites, 66 Blacks, 27 Native Americans, 77 Asian/Pacific Islanders, 272 Hispanic origins, and 38 others with a median household income of $32,690.

Located on an island joined to the mainland via a bridge on the very end of the highway, the city's school system is composed of one comprehensive high school, one out-of-house alternative high school, one middle school, and six elementary schools.

The city is also affiliated with a regional technical school, located in a neighboring community, which services a number of adjacent cities and towns. According to the 1990 census, 75% of the population has earned high school graduate status or higher while 19% has achieved bachelor's degree or higher.

Writer's Work Setting

In the throes of its ten year accreditation review by the New England Association of Secondary Schools, the professional setting is a four year comprehensive high school of 180,000 square feet situated on fourteen acres adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. The recent completion of a thirty million dollar renovation and expansion project in Spring of 1998 includes a complete overhaul of the existing building and all its components, a new library/media center, technology upgrading which allows for a minimum of 800 computer drops school-wide, and a state-of-the-art field house. A technological wonder, the building, among other high tech capacities, possesses its own in-house multiple CD tower access, Internet, server, provider, web services, and email servers. The sprawling, three story building houses 1143 students and approximately 100 staff members with both factions lacking diversity. While the student body includes less than 5% of cultures other than White, the staff population is 100% White. Administration is composed of one principal and two assistant principals and is supported by a site-based management team composed of parents, faculty, and students.

Departments within the building are art, business, English, child study, food preparation, industrial arts, math, guidance, music, health/fitness, physical education, study skills/academic assistance, special needs, science, history, theater, and world language. With 596 available course sections, the high school offers a full academic program with courses at the advanced placement, honors, college preparatory, standard and remedial levels. Advanced Placement courses are offered in English, calculus, history, Pascal, world language, biology, chemistry, and physics. In addition, the high school also houses a vocational school which includes automotive, carpentry, electrical, machine technology, and health technology programs. The Alliance Program, for those at-risk students unable for whatever reasons to function within the established high school format, offers a comprehensive learning experience within a supportive environment and includes academic subjects, community service, and counseling sessions.

Additionally, the Early Childhood Project, the STEP Program, and the Young Families Initiative are housed within the building. The ECP, a program for 3-4 year olds, provides developmentally appropriate experiences utilizing in-house and outside agency involvement (high school and child development programs within the community); STEP is a program for especially-challenged young adults and focuses on functional academics, life skills, and community job placement and was honored by being named the number one school-based training program in the state; YFI is a comprehensive program for teens and their children and pregnant teens, a subsidiary of and operated by the Child Development Program which accesses in-house and outside

agency assistance, both academic and financial. A joint venture between the business and educational communities, the Business/Education Collaborative affords students hands-on experience within three major programs: a savings bank located and operated within the building; an allied health career program facilitated at the hospital which also offers attainment of a Nurse's Aide certificate; and an advanced science lab program partnered with a major medical school within the state and offered in a laboratory constructed adjacent to the high school. An ROTC program, the Marine Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, was recently reinstituted to accommodate those students desiring military instruction. Finally, an adult education program, open to virtually anyone, offers a number of credit and non-credit courses in the evenings; in addition, a state college and a community college also offer credit and non-credit courses on the premises.

In addition, the school offers a variety of services to its student population, among them a guidance department of four full-time counselors who are also members of the school's Crisis-Intervention, Pre-Referral, and Peer Mediation teams. A full-time registered nurse and a psychologist maintain offices on the premises while a consulting psychiatrist is made available. Other services of which students may avail themselves are Project RAP, Help for Abused Women and their Children, Prevention Network, a gay and lesbian alliance, a peer mediation team, work-study programs, school to work programs, a Boy Scouts of America speaker program, and a job placement program. A vast array of interscholastic and intramural sports teams are open to all students as are numerous extra-curricular groups such as a yearbook staff, a newspaper staff, a

literary/arts magazine staff, a math club, a college bowl team, and a science team. Students may be nominated to participate in a chapter of the National Honor Society or may be elected to student government positions for their graduating class or for the student council.

Expectations of the school and its students are indicated by the school's mission statement. The school seeks to instill in each student the pleasure of learning, the satisfaction of setting and achieving personal goals, and the importance of self-respect and others. Additionally, the school curriculum acknowledges that its primary function is to provide a solid foundation of knowledge and skills needed for life-long learning and strives to promote the intellectual, creative, social, emotional, and physical development of each student. Students are expected to fulfill their academic and social potentials while developing their own special interests, abilities, and talents.

Writer's Role

With twenty-five years' experience and teaching within the English Department, the writer was responsible for five academic classes: Advanced Placement English, a rigorous course for seniors of exceptional ability; Honors English 11, a comprehensive British-based literature course for juniors; two College Preparatory English 11 classes for juniors based in British literature; and Writing for Publication, an intensive writing seminar/workshop for talented/gifted students. Holding a master of education in curriculum and instruction with a specialty in multidisciplinary studies and a focus in the multicultural and a bachelor of arts degree in English with a minor in

education, the writer has been state certified for the tenure of her career and is currently a second year doctoral candidate.

Publicly recognized for her teacher excellence nationally, state-wide and locally, she has been the advisor of the school's literary/art magazine since 1985 which has received numerous national and regional commendations of distinction for its production. In addition, the writer has consistently involved herself in professional development for the betterment of herself and of her students and has been a cooperating teacher for student teachers; she has developed curriculum, has written handbooks, has attended training programs in sensitive issues, has attended numerous conferences, and has written grants. In 1997, the writer was appointed to the steering committee for her school's ten year accreditation review. Consistently engaging herself in literature and writing, the core of her subject area, she is devoted to the development of life-long and diverse learning.

The practicum was implemented in the city's only secondary school, a four year comprehensive high school, recently established as a state-of-the-art facility for the twenty-first century, within the Advanced Placement English class (AP) for seniors. The AP English class 1998-1999 was comprised of fifteen seniors, seven females and eight males, all of whom are White. Even though a full advanced placement program was in place, there was only one section of AP English of which the writer was the sole instructor. The writer must prepare and must implement an AP curriculum which readies the students for the AP exam given in the spring semester being careful to

include a component which expands student experience in the genre of drama and which develops an understanding of its evolution.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was students within the Advanced Placement English program have limited experiences in the genre of drama and little understanding of its evolution. Students within the Advanced Placement English class did not have a diverse background in the genre of drama.

Problem Description

Within the sole AP English class, students did not possess a broad or comprehensive knowledge of the genre of world drama or of its evolution and impact on subsequently created drama. The AP English class was instituted at the writer's school five years ago and was taught by another member in the department; beginning in 1997, the writer became the AP English instructor whereupon she realized deficiencies within the curriculum itself as well as those within student learning. Based upon 1998 AP English graduates' recommendations, the writer felt the comprehensive exploration of the genre of drama, which includes a theatre of the absurd component, was a necessity. Persons affected were those in AP English 1998-1999 who underwent the AP exam in the spring semester of 1999.

Problem Documentation

There was considerable evidence that the English curriculum was inadequate regarding the genre of drama. Documentation data was collected from the 15 senior

level students enrolled in AP English 1998-1999 to support the above-stated deficiency. On a q-sort composed of the following categories—*novel, short story, poetry, Shakespearean drama, tragedy, mythology, biblical allusion, satire, ancient Greek drama, and theatre of the absurd*—the students showed their lack of knowledge within the drama categories by consistently rating them in the position representing least amount of knowledge; the lower the listing, the greater the knowledge while conversely, the higher the listing, the lesser the knowledge.

On a q-sort constructed and administered by the writer and arranged by *familiarity to the student*, 15 out of 15 students listed *theatre of the absurd* in the 10th and final listing. On the same q-sort, 14 out of 15 students listed *ancient Greek drama* in the 9th out of 10 listings while 7 out of 15 students listed *Shakespearean drama* in the 8th out of 10 listings. Further confirmation of the existence of the problem was secured via a definition question created by the writer on *theatre of the absurd* framed thusly: "On this index card, please provide a definition for the theatre of the absurd." The writer also created a rubric for the scoring of the above question with a range of 1-4 with 1 being least knowledgeable. On a rubric-scored written definition of *theatre of the absurd* with a rubric range of 1-4 (1 being least knowledgeable) administered to the 15 seniors currently enrolled in AP English 1998-1999, 12 out of 15 received only a rating of 1 while 3 students of 15 received a rating of 2.

Additional evidence to prove that the students had considerable gaps in their learning about drama, upon entering AP English in their senior years, was gathered from a poll disseminated to the 13 English Department members. A yes/no poll inquiring about the incorporation of any of 4 drama areas—*ancient Greek, Shakespearean, Modern, and Theatre of the Absurd*—as part of each teacher's curriculum was created by the writer. Administered to the 13 English Department members and yielding varied results, the yes/no poll regarding four drama areas showed deficiency in departmental curriculum implementation in two of the four drama types. Eight teachers responded yes and 5 responded no on *ancient Greek drama*; 13 teachers responded yes and 0 responded no on *Shakespearean drama*; 13 teachers responded yes and 0 no on *Modern drama*; and, 3 teachers responded yes and 10 responded no on *Theatre of the Absurd*. It is apparent that the above data collections substantiated the writer's contention as indicated in the problem statement.

Causative Analysis

Causes of the problem in the writer's work setting were diverse. First, teachers were not well-diversified in their knowledge, their training, or their curriculum implementation of the genre of drama. This cause was substantiated by the 13 English Department members who responded to the yes/no poll on varied drama curriculum implementation constructed and administered by the writer. Though all department members felt they provided instruction on Shakespearean drama and Modern drama, greater disparity was found regarding ancient Greek drama and the theatre of the

absurd. However, when polled, one member queried, " Modern drama, that's like Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*?" Hardly, though the work *is* considered modern.

Second, the existing curriculum did not encompass enough works in the genre of drama, an issue supported by the English staff's yes/no poll results and by comments made by the 15 senior level students enrolled in AP English 1998-1999. Many students, when questioned about works of drama previously studied offered the following retort, "Don't assume we studied anything; we haven't heard about that." Truly a disheartening reply by those students considered the academic elite.

Third, an inventory of materials and texts within the department indicated a deficiency in the genre of drama. Even though 13 dramatists were represented in the English Department's drama collection, only 10 were actually incorporated into the English Department curriculum. The three dramatists not covered but represented were George Bernard Shaw, Strindberg, and Edmund Rostand. An imbalance of dramatist representation was evident by the following breakdown: (1) Shakespeare was represented by 14 titles, one set per title (2) Sophocles was represented by 1 title, one set (3) O'Neill was represented by 1 title, one set (4) Fugard was represented by 1 title, one set (5) Ibsen was represented by 1 title, one set (6) Williams was represented by 3 titles, one set per title (7) Miller was represented by 2 titles, one set per title (8) MacLeish was represented by 1 title, one set (9) Wilson was represented by 1 title, one set and (10) Hansberry was represented by 1 title, one set. With such a scarcity of materials, it was no wonder that instructors and their students suffered the consequences.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Comparable problems in similar secondary school literature and/or Advanced Placement English classes are nation-wide. In a research study conducted by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature out of the State University of New York in Albany, in public schools within grades 9-12, 64.7% of required titles were novels while only 25.5% were plays. From 1963-1988, in public schools, there was an increase in the proportion of novels from 54.8% to 68.5% while there was a decrease in the proportion of plays from 26.2% to 22% (Applebee, 1993). Arthur Applebee further noted that the literature canon continues to be dominated by Shakespeare and other traditional authors (Applebee, 1990b).

In his 1989 research study, of the 43 most frequently taught books in 5% or more of public schools, the only dramas included were Sophocles' *Antigone* (28%) and *Oedipus Rex* (21%), Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (36%), Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (24%), Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (56%) and *Julius Caesar* (71%) and *Macbeth* (81%) and *Othello* (20%) and *Romeo and Juliet* (90%) (Applebee, 1989). In addition, of the 27 titles required by 30% or more of public schools (grades 7-12) in 1988, authors included Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Hamlet*), Miller (*The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*), and Wilder (*Our Town*) (Applebee, 1989).

A study conducted by Applebee in 1993 revealed that of the 10 most frequently required authors of book-length works in public schools in grades 9-12, only two were dramatists: Shakespeare and Miller (Applebee, 1993). Drama titles in decreasing

percent order included *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *The Crucible*; the remaining novels in decreasing percent order included *Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Lord of the Flies* (Applebee, 1993).

Sandra Stotsky (1990) and Judith Langer (1991) concurred with Applebee when they observed that, except for what individual English teachers have been doing, there has been no major change in the body of literary texts or in the conceptualizing of literature instruction in the past 25 years. Students remain somewhat unchallenged as many frequently read books that are short works without highly advanced vocabularies. In Stotsky's 1990 survey of the 45 most frequently recommended works of literature by New England Association of Teachers of English (NEATE) members, only 9 dramas were ranked: Miller's *The Crucible* (15th) and *Death of a Salesman* (11th), Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (12th) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (36th), Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (36th) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (12th) and *Julius Caesar* (30th) and *Macbeth* (5th) and *Romeo and Juliet* (8th) (Stotsky, 1990). Traditional canon appears to be pervasive amongst America's secondary schools.

In most schools, even though individual teachers may have made changes in assigned readings, few book-length works from alternative traditions have entered the canon of required texts (Applebee, 1992). Of the 134 titles of literature taught in 5% or more of public schools, grades 9-12, 20 were dramas. Of those 20 dramas, 8 were not in the aforementioned. However, of those 8 titles, only 6 were by dramatists previously not mentioned: *A Doll's House* by Ibsen (12%), *The Importance of Being*

Earnest by Wilde (6%), *Medea* by Euripedes (10%), *Pygmalion* by Shaw (20%), *A Raisin in the Sun* by Hansberry (17%), and *Waiting for Godot* (5%) (Applebee, 1989). Additionally, of the 645 titles required in fewer than 5% of public schools, grades 7-12, 29 were dramas. Of those 29 plays, authors not previously represented included Sartre, Aeschylus, Stoppard, Moliere, and Albee (Applebee, 1989). In addition to the traditional canon, it is these authors from alternative traditions that the Advanced Placement program culls much of its potential curriculum.

Furthermore, significant deficiency in the inclusion of and the diversity of the drama component in the AP English literature curriculum exists across the continent (McQuade, 1992). At Manchester High School in Manchester, MA, only 3 Shakespearean dramas were included: *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*. At the University of the District of Columbia in Washington, DC, only poetry and fiction were covered. At KLO Secondary School in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada and at Omaha Central High School in Omaha, Nebraska, dramatists studied were Wilde, Shakespeare, and Sophocles. Miami University in Oxford, Ohio only covered short stories, poems, and novels. In Round Rock, Texas at Round Rock High School, short stories, poetry, and the drama of Miller and Shakespeare were studied.

Moreover, at Horton Watkins High School in St. Louis, Missouri, dramatists studied were Sophocles, Ionesco, and Shakespeare. In a like manner, North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana studied dramatists Shakespeare, Miller, Sophocles, and Moliere. However, a slight variation in the drama component was

found in a secondary school in Arizona. The St. Gregory School in Tucson, Arizona included dramatists Sophocles, Shakespeare, MacLeish, Shaefer, and Williams.

Causes of the problem are varied. Because the profession as a whole, over the past twenty years, has focused its attention on writing, literature study has received short shrift (Applebee, 1990a). Since the teaching of literature is not well understood in American schools (Langer, 1991), the instructor's sense about what shapes curriculum can both broaden and narrow the dimension of its offerings (Applebee, 1994). The ambivalence in the conceptions of curriculum—either content oriented or issues and ideas based—have undermined curriculum development and planning (Applebee, 1997). Even though literature study was incorporated within school curriculum in the late 19th century (Applebee, 1991), English curriculum continues to be limited in its scope and tends to remain white, male and Eurocentrically developed (Applebee, 1994).

Other problems further complicate the issue of curriculum content. Department chairpersons and/or policies may require certain texts, thus disallowing variation accorded to individuals in their classrooms (Applebee, 1992). District mandates or literature anthology availability can also shape, either positively or negatively, the content of a school's literary curriculum (Applebee, 1989). Another element is that teacher agendas and student agendas in literature classes tend to be divergent (Burke, 1993), thus affecting choice. In his final report of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1991, Applebee reported that teachers felt they had only spent 20% of their instructional

time on drama (Applebee, 1991), further solidifying this national lack of attention to diverse forms of literature. Part of the reason that few selections from alternative traditions are included in the curriculum are (1) teachers are unfamiliar with specific titles (2) teachers are uncertain about literary merit and student appeal, and (3) teachers are concerned about community and public reaction (Applebee, 1992).

The Advanced Placement curriculum is also fraught with its own problems. First, the determination of Advanced Placement materials to be included can be a political issue (Kelley, 1994) and can truly impact to what the students are exposed. Second, the inadequate training of high school staff causes limitations for the Advanced Placement program (Kelley, 1994) further affecting not only the caliber of instruction but also the quality and variety of content offerings. Substantiating the findings of the writer's evidence and causes, the above literature review confirms that the English curriculum, and that of the AP class, within the writer's workplace was deficient in its inclusion of diverse forms of drama and, perhaps more importantly, that teachers within the English department did not diversify their curriculum implementation of the genre of drama.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

It was the goal of the writer that students completing the Advanced Placement English program would expand their experiences in the genre of drama and would develop an understanding of its evolution. The writer also expected the students to exhibit a greater understanding of drama and its evolution.

Expected Outcomes

Students would exhibit this greater understanding of drama and its evolution and would exemplify this in four ways. The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. On a post curriculum implementation administered q-sort arranged by *familiarity to the student*, there will be an increase from 0 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English 1998-1999 who will list *theatre of the absurd* in the top 5 listings.
2. On a post curriculum implementation administered q-sort arranged by *familiarity to the student*, there will be an increase from 0 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English 1998-1999 who will list *ancient Greek drama* in the top 5 listings.
3. On a post curriculum implementation administered q-sort arranged by *familiarity to the student*, there will be an increase from 1 to at least 12 of 15

students in AP English 1998-1999 who will list *Shakespearean drama* in the top 5 listings.

4. On a post curriculum implementation administered rubric-scored definition of *theatre of the absurd*, there will be an increase from 0 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English 1998-1999 who will achieve a minimum rating of 3 on a scale of 4-1, with 1 being the least knowledgeable.

Measurement of Outcomes

Outcome achievement would be determined by the evidence provided by the performance standards of the post curriculum implementation administered familiarity-arranged q-sort and of the post curriculum implementation administered rubric-scored definition. The q-sort was administered at the conclusion of the drama curriculum implementation and was completed by the 15 students in AP English 1998-1999; each student received his/her own set of cards labeled with ten curriculum items as follows: *novel, short story, poetry, Shakespearean drama, tragedy, mythology, biblical allusion, satire, ancient Greek drama, and theatre of the absurd*. Students were given as much time as individually needed, though did not use much beyond 10-15 minutes, to sort the cards by *familiarity to the student* to achieve a listing of the above 10 items with the most familiar on the top, descending in order to the least familiar. Because it incorporated ten different areas of literature study, the q-sort was selected as an evaluation instrument since it would rely on the students' accumulated knowledge, thus evincing strengths as well as gaps in their perceived knowledge bases.

The rubric-scored definition was administered at the conclusion of the drama curriculum implementation and was completed by the 15 students in AP English 1998-1999; each student received his/her own index card upon which s/he was asked to respond to the following prompt: "On this index card, please provide a definition for the theatre of the absurd." Students were given as much time as needed to complete the activity, though did not use much beyond 10-15 minutes. The rubric-scored written definition was selected because each student would then be required to ponder, to consolidate, to synthesize, and to apply information gleaned from the 12-week comprehensive drama curriculum to demonstrate that knowledge had been assimilated; in addition, creative and critical thinking skills would be tapped. The rubric, constructed and employed by the writer, was as follows: 1—no real knowledge, no examples, lack of suitable definition, 2—few aspects or qualities of definition, no examples, 3—some aspects or qualities of definition, an example, and 4—clear definition with examples.

Each data collection instrument was administered on the same day at the conclusion of the drama curriculum implementation. Student informal/formal, verbal/anecdotal feedback which occurred during the curriculum implementation and/or post curriculum data collection processes was documented by the writer; in addition, selected student-written literary analyses were retained for reference and for further evidence of student growth.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem to be solved in this practicum was students within the Advanced Placement English program had limited experiences in the genre of drama and little understanding of its evolution. Students within the Advanced Placement English class did not have a diverse background in the genre of drama. Solution strategies for the presented problem were diverse.

First, the development and implementation of curriculum that is challenging and thought-provoking is a necessity for accelerated learners. Advanced Placement students most definitely represent that faction of our high schools' populations. Arthur Applebee remarked that "content that does not invoke further conversation is of no interest" (Applebee, 1994, p. 47). Shore and Delcourt (1996) agreed that high level curricula materials which focus on abstract and basic concepts and cognitive and affective needs and which foster thinking skills and an in-depth investigation of subject matter will challenge accelerated learners. Curriculum content must pique students' curiosity and must fulfill students' needs; the development of that curriculum content must satisfy those needs for skill development, knowledge, and enrichment in order to strengthen academic success (Duckett, 1998). Instructors must continue to involve themselves in that development, for engagement in continued curriculum development will help to fill the gaps that have occurred in student learning (VanTassel-Baska, 1992). While developing and incorporating this curriculum, instructors must heed the

words of Cope and Kalantzis; the "new pedagogy favors 'unstructured' experience, 'natural' immersions, and eclectic pastiche of curriculum content" (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 18).

Second, a well-designed Advanced Placement program that meets the needs of the learners, that prepares the learners for the Advanced Placement examination, and that allows for inclusion of varied literature is integral (Hoven, 1995). It has been recommended that drama should be included in literature curriculum to make better use of the method of thinking about meaning (Grainger, 1998), certainly a component of developing critical thinking skills. The College Entrance Examination Board, creator of the Advanced Placement programs, advised that students must be engaged in the careful reading of and the critical analysis of imaginative literature (College Entrance Examination Board, 1998) and went so far as to offer suggested reading lists/authors in the areas of poetry, drama, novel, short story, and expository prose. Drama suggestions were of multicultural and multi-type forms; examples of suggested dramatists were Albee, Beckett, Hwang, Ibsen, Miller, Moliere, O'Neill, Pinter, Pirandello, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Stoppard, Wilde, Williams, and Wilson (College Entrance Examination Board, 1998). All of the above examples conform to the four major areas of drama presented in this practicum proposal's evidence section—*ancient Greek, Shakespearean, Modern, and Theatre of the Absurd*. Cited in the Advanced Placement English syllabi, two schools in West Hartford, Connecticut employed more expanded drama units of study than other schools (McQuade, 1992). The Kingswood-Oxford School included Shaffer, Stoppard, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Beckett, O'Neill,

and Miller. The William H. Hall High School studied MacLeish, Shakespeare, Beckett, Stoppard, Sophocles, and O'Neill. (McQuade, 1992).

Third, an additional solution strategy is the training of teachers. Teachers of Advanced Placement who are properly trained and motivated can strengthen high school English curricula and can save students academic time and tuition costs at college (Davis, 1996). Shore and Delcourt (1996) concurred when they recommended that gifted programs be taught by well-trained and experienced staff. The teaching of Advanced Placement classes is a reciprocal experience; teachers can refine their own academic proficiency and expertise as they train Advanced Placement students for the examination (Davis, 1996). The Advanced Placement Program itself, a subdivision of The College Board, encouraged schools to teach certain courses and also offered teachers guidance in the teaching of those courses (Valentine, 1987). In addition, Advanced Placement instructors should facilitate opportunities to learn from one another and to mentor one another (Hoven, 1995). Examples of such opportunities are in-service half days, observations, co-teaching opportunities, videotaping, and attendance of Advanced Placement conferences and workshops. Supplementary opportunities may derive from experienced Advanced Placement instructors mentoring novice AP teachers via observation and interviewing (Hoven, 1995).

As a result of reviewing the literature for solutions, two ideas came to the forefront. One, the study of drama, including that of the theatre of the absurd, satisfies curriculum implementation that is challenging, thought-provoking, and eclectic. And, two, abstract concepts found in absurdist drama and which connect to related areas

such as surrealism, existentialism, satire, the grotesque, and other modes of artistic expression will pose a challenge to accelerated learners.

The three solutions generated from the literature may be critiqued from the writer's vantage point of setting and power base. First, developing and implementing a challenging and thought-provoking English curriculum as suggested by Applebee (1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997), VanTassel-Baska (1992), Cope and Kalantzis (1993), Shore and Delcourt (1996), and Duckett (1998) was within the writer's power base as she was allowed latitude by the Advanced Placement branch of The College Board to include literature and instruction methodology which would maximize student knowledge and skill development. Second, designing a challenging drama component within the Advanced Placement English curriculum as suggested by two model drama syllabi (McQuade, 1992), Hoven (1995), (Grainger, 1998), and the College Entrance Examination Board (1998) was within the writer's power base as she was able to manipulate the curriculum as proposed by The College Board to meet the needs of the students and the requirements of the Advanced Placement Literature and Composition program and examination. And, third, the training of teachers as suggested by Valentine (1987), Hoven (1995), Davis (1996), and Shore and Delcourt (1996) was not within the writer's power base as she was the sole instructor of the AP English class and was also unable to mandate professional development opportunities.

Description of Selected Solutions

The solution implemented was that the writer developed, refined, and implemented a well-designed curriculum unit in the genre of drama which included a theatre of the absurd component in her Advanced Placement English class. This curriculum unit challenged, provoked, and satiated the learning of students in the AP class (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Applebee, 1994; Shore & Delcourt, 1996; Duckett, 1998). Additionally, it filled the gaps in their learning (VanTassel-Baska, 1992). Incorporation of the drama unit with a theatre of the absurd component satisfied the suggestions and recommendations of The College Board, developers of the Advanced Placement Program (College Entrance Examination Board, 1998) and allowed for inclusion of varied literature (Hoven, 1995).

Justification for this solution was evident in the causal analysis. Since teachers in the department were not implementing a broad scope of the study of drama, the students in Advanced Placement English possessed gaps in their learning and in their understanding of the evolution of drama. Furthermore, though drama materials and texts may have been lacking within the department, an innovative instructor was able to circumvent this restraint. Further justification was evident in the writer's role regarding problem and setting. She was personally and definitively able to impact those students in AP English 1998-1999 as she was the sole instructor of the class and was also allowed latitude in the development of AP curriculum and its content. Finally, justification was also warranted by the fact that the AP English students would expand their experiences in drama and would develop an understanding of its evolution; they

would exemplify this via the expected attainment of the projected measurable evidence outcomes as indicated in Chapter III.

Report of Action Taken

The writer's leadership role during implementation was that of a change facilitator as espoused by the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) out of the University of Texas/Austin; in addition, the writer also provided leadership in the model maintained by the systems thinking of Peter Senge. Since individuals must be the focus of attention in a new implementation, the AP students and their successes assisted departmental members in viewing the newly implemented drama curriculum positively. Moreover, via the writer's adoption of the proposed innovation, departmental members were provoked to provide connected, cumulative, and competitive literature curricula for their students.

By adopting the role of "local line leader," the writer, via curriculum implementation, affected the direction of improved results, both in student knowledge and in anticipated outcomes. Furthermore, by setting an example, the writer effected change by modeling; others in the department were encouraged to follow her example. Above all, by carrying out the goals of the implemented curriculum, the writer transformed the educational processes and experiences of her students as well as impacted and challenged the English curriculum, and its instructors, and the Advanced Placement English curriculum within her work setting.

The writer implemented a comprehensive drama unit which included a theatre of the absurd component within her Advanced Placement English class 1998-1999 of senior level students. This unit involved the reading of and the critical analysis of varied works of drama, as suggested by The College Board, and included an historical perspective of the evolution of the genre of drama. By reading seminal works by major dramatists within the genre, students explored the inception of the genre of drama and its impact upon subsequently created drama as well as its effect upon its own creation. The four major types of drama initially polled of the 13 English department members—*ancient Greek, Shakespearean, Modern, and Theatre of the Absurd*—were depicted by specific works implemented within the curriculum unit. Collectively, the drama unit was comprised of the following works: Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*; Euripedes' *Medea*; Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *The Taming of the Shrew*; Ibsen's *Ghosts*; Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*; O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*; MacLeish's *JB*; Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*; and, Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

The fifteen students enrolled in Advanced Placement English 1998-1999 were directly affected by the curriculum unit implementation though it had more far-reaching effects, i.e. departmental curriculum or department instructors. Over a course of twelve weeks, students engaged themselves in the drama curriculum; evaluation of the success or failure of the curriculum occurred at the conclusion of the twelve week unit, two weeks after the administration of the national AP English Literature and

Composition examination. The AP English class was run in a seminar format with the writer as facilitator and leader; she developed all curriculum units and provided students with extensive background and biographical material for each of the works. Instigated by writing prompts, students created literary and critical analyses on each of the dramas which incorporated original perspective and were assisted by class lessons, activities, and discussions.

Over a three month period, students were engaged in the reading of twelve works of drama which fell into the four above-named categories. Students were presented an history of drama which encompassed the ancient Greeks and Romans, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the 17th and 18th and 19th centuries, the 20th century, and the theatre of the absurd. Since much of drama emanated from and owed its roots to the ancient Greeks, an overview of the Greek theater and of the structure of its drama was presented. Included were lessons on the ode (e.g., strophe, antistrophe, epode), the elements of tragedy, the tragic hero, and Aristotle's *Poetics*, which defines tragedy in drama. An intensive study of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* ensued after students read each play. Students also explored Freudian and Jungian theory on Oedipal and Electra complexes. To further define the tragic hero and to illustrate the concepts of hubris, hamartia, peripeteia, and catharsis, the mini-unit on Sophocles' works culminated in the viewing of the film, *A Few Good Men*, with the character of Colonel Jessup as its tragic hero. Study of the ancient Greeks continued with Euripedes' *Medea*, an overview of the chorus in Greek drama, the

Greek myth of Jason and Medea, and a detailed view of the structure of classical Greek tragedy.

Study of tragedy continued with Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Following lessons on drama structure (e.g., exposition, rising action, crisis, falling action, conclusion and resolution) and drama terminology pertinent to Shakespearean tragedy, students read the play and drew correlations to the plays of Sophocles and Euripedes while exploring thematic and critical analysis. Students also analyzed the protagonist, King Lear, using the precepts of the tragic hero in addition to preparing analytical essays. As a respite from tragedy, students next read Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, a light comedy and possible precursor to the theatre of the absurd with its farcical tone, puns and twisted meanings, and slapstick humor. Students enjoyed watching a spoof of the play as interpreted by a now defunct television series, *Moonlighting*, which starred Bruce Willis and Cybill Shepherd.

Drama study continued with a focus on modern drama and on Henrik Ibsen who is credited with evolving drama by instituting direct statement by characters and dramatic discussion. Students read Ibsen's *Ghosts* and explored his intent to incite reaction in his readers with controversial exposés of the puritanical notions of the Victorian era. The study of modern drama continued with Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a symbolic psychological drama grounded in the theme of illusion and reality. Williams' development of the female character and mastery of creative dialogue assisted students in their viewing of Elia Kazan's classic film of the play, a venue Williams himself preferred to the Broadway version.

Next, students learned about Eugene O'Neill and how his drama was heavily influenced by the ancient Greeks, both in content and in structure. After reading the blatantly autobiographical *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, students explored its thematic parallels to previously studied works in the implemented unit and created analytical essays on varied topics. Continuing an exploration of modern drama, students prepared for Archibald MacLeish's *JB* by first reading the Book of Job from the *Bible*. Exploring Aristotelian influences and the use of diverse allusions in the play, students not only drew parallels to the Bible but also to Greek tragedy via the chorus and the masks and to modern theater's numerous stage and lighting directions.

Culminating in a study of the theatre of the absurd, the final mini-unit presented absurdism in philosophy, in politics, in poetry, in fiction, in theater, and in art. Prior to reading two seminal works of drama, a preliminary review and examination of the concepts of absurdism, existentialism, surrealism, and Dadaism in works of René Magritte, Marc Chagall, Lewis Carroll, and Laurence Ferlinghetti were conducted. In addition, instruction on the conventions and the structure of absurdist drama and its history and background was offered. Armed with these tools, students next read Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and applied their new-found knowledge to the analysis and to the understanding of the play via discussion and written composition. Poetry by T. S. Eliot ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Hollow Men") and Archibald MacLeish ("The End of the World") deepened student understanding of absurdism and existentialism.

Rounding out the study of the theatre of the absurd was Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* which students read and related to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (previously read by all students in the AP class in their junior year) and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Exploration of language study, syllogisms, puns, rhetorical games, and literary allusions assisted in making the absurdity of the play more accessible to student interpretation. After numerous class discussions and written analysis of the play, students enjoyed a dramatic reading by their classmates of Abbott and Costello's classic *Who's on First?* as further illustration of some of the inanity of the bantering that peppers Stoppard's work. As a final fun activity and primarily to further understand and to appreciate cadencing and phrasing of wordplay and using mannerisms and gesticulations, students viewed the video of Abbott and Costello's famous routine.

Throughout the entire curriculum implementation, which occurred every school day for the three month period with some slight deviation, students applied knowledge of the drama types to assimilate the impact of the four drama types upon one another. A final review of the above implemented works of drama synthesized the evolution of the genre of drama and expanded student experience with drama.

Permission from the school system's superintendent and the high school's principal to conduct the practicum in the writer's workplace and within her Advanced Placement class 1998-1999 was secured in writing prior to the conduction of the pre curriculum implementation data collection. In addition, though many students in AP English 1998-1999 were 18 years old, informative letters with accompanying consent

forms were sent to the parents/guardians of the 15 students via the students. All 15 students and their parents/guardians affirmed in writing the students' approval of becoming cooperative participants in the writer's practicum prior to partaking in the pre curriculum implementation data collection.

Supplies, such as the works of drama, were borrowed from the English Department's literature collection. Works that were unavailable within that collection were secured by the writer and were distributed to each student. Curriculum materials/units were developed by the writer. Use of facilities and machines posed no problem as the writer, a state-certified English teacher, is a full-time employee of the school system and is assigned to the high school.

However, some deviations in the implementation schedule occurred which set the conclusion of the curriculum unit and the post curriculum implementation data collection two weeks beyond the administration of the national Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition examination. First, a student's class presentation, which should have taken one 45 minute period, actually used three and a half 45 minute periods, thus altering the scheduled daily lesson plans. Second, the writer was impaneled on a jury for a week's duration also affecting the daily schedule of events. And, third, administration of the national Advanced Placement examinations further affected the writer's ability to continue with the intended daily schedule; the exams were conducted over a two week period and since many students in AP English undertook numerous AP classes, the AP English class attendance was affected enough to suspend lessons to postponement dates.

Chapter V: Results

Results

Within the writer's Advanced Placement English class, students, upon entering, did not possess a broad or comprehensive knowledge of the genre of world drama or of its evolution and impact on subsequently created drama. It was the goal of the writer that students completing the Advanced Placement English program would expand their experiences in the genre of drama and would develop an understanding of its evolution. In addition, the writer also expected the students to exhibit a greater understanding of drama and of its evolution. To facilitate these expectations, the writer developed, refined, and implemented a well-designed curriculum unit in the genre of drama which included a theatre of the absurd component in her Advanced Placement English class.

1. On a post curriculum implementation administered q-sort arranged by *familiarity to the student*, there will be an increase from 0 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English who will list *theatre of the absurd* in the top 5 listings.

This outcome was not met.

Only 3 of 15 students listed *theatre of the absurd* in the top 5 listings. However, there was marked improvement from the pre curriculum implementation administered q-sort where 15 of 15 students listed *theatre of the absurd* in the 10th and final listing. The post curriculum implementation administered q-sort listing for *theatre of the absurd* was as follows: 1 student in 3rd place, 1 student in 4th place, 1 student in 5th place, 1 student in 6th place, 4 students in 7th place, 3 students in 8th place, 1 student in

9th place, and 3 students in 10th place. At least 12 of 15 students had indicated an improvement in the listing of *theatre of the absurd*, post curriculum implementation.

2. On a post curriculum implementation administered q-sort arranged by *familiarity to the student*, there will be an increase from 0 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English 1998-1999 who will list *ancient Greek drama* in the top 5 listings.

This outcome was not met.

Only 2 of 15 students listed *ancient Greek drama* in the top five listings. Again, however, there was considerable improvement from the pre curriculum implementation administered q-sort where 14 of 15 students listed *ancient Greek drama* in the 9th listing and 1 of 15 students listed *ancient Greek drama* in the 7th listing. The post curriculum implementation administered q-sort listing for *ancient Greek drama* was as follows: 2 students in 5th place, 2 students in 6th place, 2 students in 7th place, 1 student in 8th place, 3 students in 9th place, and 5 students in 10th place. Even though 5 of 15 students felt less confident about *ancient Greek drama* post curriculum, at least 9 of 15 students had shown improvement in the listing of *ancient Greek drama*, post curriculum implementation, while 1 of 15 remained constant in the listing.

3. On a post curriculum implementation administered q-sort arranged by familiarity to the student, there will be an increase from 1 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English 1998-1999 who will list *Shakespearean drama* in the top 5 listings.

This outcome was not met.

Only 5 of 15 students listed *Shakespearean drama* in the top 5 listings. Even though there was improvement, 2 students rated *Shakespearean drama* in a lesser listing (9th place). The post curriculum implementation q-sort listing for *Shakespearean drama* was as follows: 4 students in 4th place, 1 student in 5th place, 3 students in 6th place, 2 students in 7th place, 3 students in 8th place, and 2 students in 9th place. Pre curriculum implementation, the q-sort listing for *Shakespearean drama* was more concentrated in the bottom half of the listings: 1 student in 4th place, 4 students in 6th place, 3 students in 7th place, and 7 students in 8th place.

4. On a post curriculum implementation administered rubric-scored definition of *theatre of the absurd*, there will be an increase from 0 to at least 12 of 15 students in AP English 1998-1999 who will achieve a minimum rating of 3 on a scale of 1-4, with 1 being the least knowledgeable.

This outcome was met.

Twelve of 15 students achieved a rating of 3 and 3 students achieved a rating of 2 on a scale of 1-4 (1 being least knowledgeable) on the post curriculum implementation rubric-scored definition of *theatre of the absurd*. This was a considerable improvement, given the pre curriculum implementation rubric-scored definition resulted in 12 students with a rating of 1 and 3 students with a rating of 2. Rubric ratings were as follows: 1—no real knowledge, no examples, lack of suitable definition, 2—few aspects or qualities of definition, no examples, 3—some aspects of definition, an example, 4—clear definition with examples. Pre curriculum

implementation rubric-scored definitions as written by the 15 AP students and their ratings follow.

Definitions with a rating of 2 are

a. Student 1—I have no idea, but the theatre of the absurd could be an untraditional theatre.

b. Student 2—Theatre of the absurd is a freak show that although goofy is preferred by good actors. Examples are *The Interview* and *The Bald Soprano* and most other performances by the Thespians at Dramafest.

c. Student 3—Theatre of the absurd is jumbled, unclear, and/or ludicrous images and actions formed in such a way within a play as to provide some sort of social commentary or to send some other message (at least something like that).

Definitions with a rating of 1 are

a. Student 4—Theater of the absurd is comical drama that mixes up plot sequence. Out of order plot. I've never heard the term before.

b. Student 5—Theatre of the absurd is [perhaps] a form of drama in which the meaning or theme of the play is hidden within the abstract happenings of the scenes or outcomes of the characters. I don't know.

c. Student 6—Theater of the absurd is a special kind of drama with an almost constant comicalness (sic).

d. Student 7—I'm guessing but…theatre of the absurd is a theater used for comedies and circuses.

e. Student 8—The theatre of the absurd is a combination of queer and weird acts. Such as in a circus with the two headed lady and woman with a beard. I have no clue.

f. Student 9—Theatre of the absurd: the location at which strange plays and other theatrical numbers are performed. I don't know.

g. Student 10—I have no clue what theater of the absurd is. It is a type of play that is completely ridiculous or not believable at all.

h. Student 11—Theater of the absurd is a theater in which plays of nonsense and absurdity are performed. Usually about the circus. I don't know.

i. Student 12—I have not heard of theatre of the absurd. It could be a description of certain plays and the actors that perform in them.

j. Student 13—Theater of the absurd is comedic theater (plays). The comedy is quite ridiculous, hence the name absurd.

k. Student 14—Theatre of the absurd is plays about clowns and what they go through on a daily basis. I don't know.

l. Student 15—The theater of the absurd is the original name for the sideshows that were at carnivals and circuses.

Post curriculum implementation rubric-scored definitions as written by the 15 AP students and their ratings follow. Definitions with a rating of 2 are

a. Student 12—Theatre of the absurd is a type of drama that illustrates the repetition and actions of everyday life by the use of comedy. Deals with people's lives and why they are here.

b. Student 13—Theatre of the absurd defines the types of plays, written primarily in the twentieth century, that are not considered classic literature, but feature absurd comedy.

c. Student 14—Theatre of the absurd is a genre of drama in which the characters have no identity and there is little to no plot.

Definitions with a rating of 3 are

a. Student 1—Theatre of the absurd is a form of drama in which characters, places and occurrences are confused. There is no exact knowledge of the action; it appears to be meaningless conversation when in fact it serves to question the meaning of life.

b. Student 2—Theatre of the absurd is theatre with existentialist views. It often involves quick banter and bizarre locations and actions. The plays are usually based on the characters realizing their humanity and mortality.

c. Student 3—Theatre of the absurd: a genre of plays that involves using strange imagery, confusing dialogue, and other unconventional and sometimes annoying techniques to illustrate various philosophies involving the absurdity of life.

d. Student 4—The theater of the absurd is drama in which the absurdities of normal lives are exaggerated to such an extent that life seems meaningless.

e. Student 5—Theater of the absurd is a play by which the nonsensical events and lack of plot reveal the absurdity of mankind and one's existence.

f. Student 6—Theater of the absurd is a genre where there is (sic) extremely improbable events occurring. Also the theater of the absurd has comical

qualities which often consist of repetition and a lack of understanding between characters.

g. Student 7—A form of drama in which frivolous, non-important actions are the crux of the work. May rely on existentialistic views and/or roundabout and uncommon reasoning.

h. Student 8—In theatre of the absurd characters feel as if there is no meaning to their significance.

i. Student 9—Theatre of the absurd: the questioning of what truly is; confusion between fantasy and reality, lack of purpose.

j. Student 10—Theater of the absurd: drama in which the characters search for validation to their lives and the plot of it is absolutely ridiculous and without meaning.

k. Student 11—The theater of the absurd is a style of writing plays which questions man's purpose in life, if he has one at all. Writing and speech is (sic) often redundant and incoherent.

l. Student 15—Theater of the absurd: nonsensical writing that illustrates that a person must create meaning within his/her own life.

Discussion

Even though three of four of the projected outcomes were not met, a review of the pre and the post curriculum implementation data and student commentary/essays indicates that the comprehensive drama unit which includes a theatre of the absurd component implemented within the Advanced Placement English program for senior level students was a successful endeavor. Tallies indicate that there was marked improvement in the experience with and the comprehension of all three drama forms—*theatre of the absurd, ancient Greek, and Shakespearean*. Supported by the more substantive and explicatory post curriculum implementation student definitions (see Results section), the purpose of the curriculum unit implementation was definitely achieved. Since it was the writer's intent that students expand their experiences and develop and exhibit greater understanding of drama and its evolution, the fact that this improvement occurred offers support to the contention that the students, pre implementation, were deficient in their drama experiences.

Student commentary further substantiates the positive effects of the implemented drama curriculum. At the conclusion of the curriculum unit, 12 of 15 students raised their listing of *theatre of the absurd* on the q-sort, and 12 of 15 students raised their rating on the rubric-scored written definition from 1 to 3. During the study of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, an understanding of the concepts presented in the unit was revealed.

For example, about *Waiting for Godot*, one student observed, "through their meaningless conversations and absentmindedness, the characters show that if

importance was illustrated with sound, their lives, like the lives of most people, would make no noise." He further elaborated that their "lives were so futile, that they were incapable of doing anything other than nothing" and they would "forever remain in their state of agonizing emptiness." Another student relayed, "these two characters, with their nonchalant attitudes about life, create this confusion that questions the importance of time and place in human existence." She added, "Vladimir and Estragon do the same thing each day, wait for Godot. To them, time is nothing; it is neither a concept nor a mere happening." Still another student, when commenting upon the mysteriousness of existence, concurred that, "the real mystery is the crazy antics mankind performs throughout the duration of life." He continued, " the characters in this play will do anything, just as mankind has been doing for centuries, to understand his role in life and the mystery of what seems a sad and lonely existence." When making determinations about the goals of the curriculum unit, these astute observations are more telling regarding an understanding and an exhibition of knowledge than the non-achieved data collection outcomes.

Students continued to exhibit their knowledge and their understanding about the theatre of the absurd by commenting on Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. About the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, one student noted that "their confusion led them to question the meaning of their existence which shows that the true meaning of knowing one's identity is imperative to knowing the importance of his/her existence." Yet another classmate elucidated, "because these two men are unable to identify themselves without questioning their accuracy, it becomes obvious

that they actually lack identities, that is, the uniqueness that allows them the individuality of personal indisputable identification." She continued that their "inability to distinguish between themselves proves that their existence is not only insignificant to the reader, but even to themselves." Alluding to previously studied drama, parallels between the roles of the characters became evident to the students; the Player is "perhaps the most absurd character, yet makes the most sense" as he is "quite reminiscent of the Fool in *King Lear* as he is as comedic and wise as Lear's jester." The student further commented on the Player's perception of actors and the theater; "acting is not reality…although mankind pretends most its life, searching for the meaning of existence, mankind still does not compare to the flourish of the theater…Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, like 'everyman,' suffer not knowing what is real and learn that the only end is death." Again, the depth of student commentary only affirms the acquisition of knowledge and the expression of discovery.

Knowledge acquisition also was evident in the study of ancient Greek drama, even though the collected data did not meet the projected outcome. Prior to the curriculum, 14 of 15 students placed *ancient Greek drama* in the next to the last rating (9^{th}) while 1 dominated the 7^{th} slot. However, after curriculum implementation, only 8 students rated it in the last two ratings (9^{th} and 10^{th}) with 7 students dispersing from 5^{th} through 8^{th}. About *Antigone*, one student questioned whether "the moral laws which provide foundation for religion and ethics or the laws of the state that prevent chaos should reign supreme." She countered with "in true tragic form, *Antigone* closes with grief for

all parties involved, demonstrating that although moral laws and civil laws are quite different, and at times in conflict, a compromise must be reached to prevent tragedy." Concerning Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, students felt his life was destined to tragedy; one young woman believed that he lived in an "existential world in where there was no consideration for human beings" and that his fate "stemmed from the gods" thus allowing him "no means of force to control his fate." Another classmate asserted that "in the end, the lesson these Greeks learn is that there is no real escape from a fate already determined and that life is only determined by sightless fate." Elaborating on this, a third classmate argued that Oedipus blinding himself was "supposed to be the catharsis to make the audience pity Oedipus," yet the fact "whether or not one can feel pity that this man chose this path is questionable in light of the assumption Oedipus has no free will—it is his destiny to blind himself and he should not be pitied." It is evident that the students assimilated, synthesized and applied presented material to create knowledge of their own.

Verification of this was also provided by student commentary regarding Shakespearean drama even though projected outcomes were not attained; post curriculum, only 5 of 15 students rated *Shakespearean drama* in the top five, contrasting yet showing improvement from the pre curriculum rating of 1 of 15 students. Study of Sophocles' work encouraged students to examine tragedy and the tragic hero in *King Lear*. One student was prompted to remark that "two very tragic heroes" were "doomed to their sad fates" by "their parental flaws." Another relayed that Lear's "fatal flaw is his excess pride" in a play where "madness is insight and

blindness is knowledge." A third student considered Lear's physical blindness to clarify "the true deceptions...faced so ignorantly." She further declared that the "power of human illusion" blinded the characters to the "reality of the world and their place in it." For students who began with deficiencies in their drama study, the power of their own observations and analyses solidifies the fact that they understand and exhibit greater understanding of drama because their experiences with drama have been expanded.

The solution implemented certainly included challenging and provocative literature appropriate and necessary for accelerated learners and followed guidelines as set forth by The College Board for the Advanced Placement Program. Students most definitely exhibited a greater understanding of drama and its evolution, as evinced by class discussion and student written commentary. So, why were three of the four outcomes not met? Quantitative data was most likely skewed because one of the collection instruments, the q-sort, which determined three of the four outcomes, was too diverse in its topic listings. Of course, most students would be more familiar, and with some universal consistency, with the novel, the short story, poetry, and satire; therefore, the topic listings should be limited to drama terminology instead of literature terminology sprinkled with drama terms. Second, some students may have disengaged themselves from the daily curriculum after the national AP English literature and composition examination was administered on May 10, 1999; they may have felt as if they had fulfilled their academic obligations to themselves even though their senior year did not technically end until May 28, 1999.

The students who were exposed to this curriculum unit now possess a more well-rounded and stronger literature and drama base and have had the gaps in their learning filled. Films used further enhanced their understanding of the key concepts of drama and its elements and of the literature itself. Even though the projected quantitative data outcomes did not prevail, the preponderance of positive qualitative data indicates that educational intervention via a drama curriculum unit can greatly affect student scholastic evolution and growth and can more fully prepare AP students for the fulfillment of a national curriculum which culminates in a highly competitive national examination. Literature-based instruction affords so much more than mere tutelage. By providing challenging and eclectic literature, educators may encourage their students to use "critical perception and interpretation" to "unveil what is hidden in the text" (Reading the World and Reading the Word, 1985, p. 18) and to propel them to reach beyond their grasps.

Recommendations

Since the implemented drama unit encompassed a broad range of drama types and involved the study and the reading of twelve dramas over a twelve week period, the comprehensiveness of the presented material may have been too large an undertaking, even for the most accelerated student. Therefore, it is suggested that English department members begin to incorporate drama study of a challenging nature amongst all high school grade levels. Replication of this practicum would require that the q-sort data collection instrument be altered in its topic listings; all listings should be

connected to the genre of drama and not to the more generic genre of literature. Students would then, therefore, be more likely to rely on the information presented in the implemented curriculum rather than on their cumulative literary knowledge gleaned from their four years of high school literature study. And finally, since many students may "shut down" after taking the AP examination in early May, implementation of the curriculum unit should be scheduled so it would conclude prior to the administration of the AP English literature and composition examination.

Dissemination

The results of this practicum will be shared with the writer's English department colleagues at one of the department's meetings, and upon individual request, the final report will be made available to immediate colleagues desiring replication or information. In addition, for dissemination to a more broad professional base of colleagues, the final report will be available via Nova Southeastern University's library resources and the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS).

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